

SESSION 45: A PRESERVING SHOEBOX

Genesis 6:13-16

October 6, 2024

PREFACE

I take it that we have now reached the end of the 120-year grace period extended by Yahweh in Genesis 6:3. He has granted them several generations to repent and change their ways, but the population of the earth has just grown more evil, more corrupt. In our previous session we understood that this was *not* a case of a few bad apples causing doom for all, but of an entire world literally *consumed* by and with unremitting evil.

Read Genesis 6:11-16.

This is not a description of a world with just a few bad apples.

Note:

the earth was corrupt

the earth was **filled** with violence.

it [the earth] was corrupt;

all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

the earth is filled with violence

Here was a foreshadowing of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of the great harlot Babylon (Revelation 17:5). ➡ The book of the Revelation offers us a picture that would seem to apply as much to the state of things just before the Flood, as it does specifically to the period at the end of the Tribulation.

Read Revelation 18:1-3.

v13

Just a few more thoughts on this verse.

Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth."

And [the angel] carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; then I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her sexual immorality, and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." (Revelation 17:3-5)

K&D: “The end of all flesh is come before Me.” when applied to rumours, invariably signifies “to reach the ear” (vid., Genesis 18:21; Exo_3:9; Est_9:11). [But] in this case *ges* is not the end in the sense of destruction, but the end (extremity) of depravity or corruption, which leads to destruction.

That is, “The end of all flesh has come before Me” is God declaring that humanity has reached the limit of depravity, and thus it is required of a holy and righteous God to take action against them.

A member of our class raised an interesting question last week: Does “I am about to destroy them with the earth” mean that God is going to destroy the earth *along with* man—or that He will use the earth to destroy man? I could find no one to substantiate that second interpretation; the NIVs make it obvious with “I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.” Nonetheless, it is an interesting take, because God *does* employ the subterranean earth to release its “fountains” to quickly flood the earth.

In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on this day all the fountains of the great deep split open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened. (Genesis 7:11)

Finally, there is a play on words in vv12-13 which is missed in the English translations. All our versions use the word “destroy” at the end of v13, but it is the same Hebrew word translated “corrupt/corrupted” in vv11-12. It is God saying, *Your lives have become morally ruinous, so I am going to ruin both you and the earth on which you dwell.*

But there is also a practical difference between the two *uses* of the word: aside from Noah’s family, the people will be literally destroyed—dead—while the earth will be *remade*, reshaped, reconfigured. Now God describes to Noah the means by which he and his family will escape the coming wrath.

vv14-15: CONSTRUCTION AND DIMENSIONS

“Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood...”

Only the NIVs have “cypress wood”; the rest have “gopher wood” for the material with which to construct the ark—but no one knows what gopher wood is! 📖 (We can only assume that at least Noah understood which trees to cut down.)

Hebrew: *go-per*,
pronounced *go-phair*.

We all have so many preconceptions, and have seen so many illustrations of the “ark,” that we need to understand what all these words really mean. First there is the word translated “ark.” The only other use of this word—Hebrew *tebah* (tay-VAH)—is in another familiar story from Sunday School: Moses in the bulrushes. And that is not the only similarity between the two stories.

Read Exodus 2:2-3. (ESV)

Some of our versions use the word “ark,” but also basket; it is the same word as in Genesis 6:14, and it is possible it is a loan-word from the Egyptian (*teb*). The word refers to a box or chest, even coffin, and what these have in common is that they in no way describe a “boat.” This vessel was never intended to sail or navigate through the waves; it was meant to be a simple rectangular, yet floating box for the preservation of lives in the flood. There is no mention of a keel, or rounded or sloping sides, or a helm. It was just a box.

David Guzik: What is described is not really a boat, but a well-ventilated barge, meant only to float and not to sail anywhere. After all, an ark is a chest, not a ship; this refers to the “shoebox” shape of the vessel.

“...you shall make the ark with rooms, and you shall cover it inside and out with pitch.”

Like Moses’ little ark for one, this ark needed to be sealed to keep its occupants dry. Literally the text reads, as in the KJV, “pitch it...with pitch.” That is, the same root word—Hebrew *kaparta/kopher*—is used as both verb and noun. This is an interesting word, for at its root it means “cover,” as in the ransom paid for a life. So, essentially, the naturally occurring substance of tar-like pitch, or bitumen, is sealing the ark—inside and out—to protect it, “cover” it from the water.

In God’s description we see that this ark will be more than just a box; it will contain what all our versions call “rooms.” The Hebrew is *qinnim* (plural), and means, literally, “nest.”

**“Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
That hovers over its young,
He spread His wings and caught them;
He carried them on His pinions.” (Deuteronomy 32:11)**

And here I think the movie, *The Bible: In the Beginning*, has it about right. In that film the interior of the ark is rudely sectioned off into stalls filled with straw for the animals, as well as the humans. So I believe we are not only *not* talking about enclosed apartments, or even walled cubicles, but crude, fenced-off stalls filled with fodder used for bedding and, in some cases, food for the animals.

v15

“Now this is how you shall make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, its breadth 50 cubits, and its height 30 cubits.”

The ancient cubit is generally reckoned to be equal to 18 inches (the length from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger), so translating these dimensions into more familiar measurements we find that

a length of 300 cubits = 450 feet;

a width of 50 cubits = 75 feet; and

a height of 30 cubits = 45 feet

—as the original NIV translates for us.

John Sailhamer puts this into perspective for us.

Sailhamer: For a wooden vessel, the size of the ark was enormous by ancient as well as modern standards. It would have been about two and a half times the size of the large “Byblos-boats” used by the Egyptians during the Early Dynastic Period and would even have been larger than the largest wooden ships in the modern period of sailing. The Cutty Sark, a three-masted clipper ship launched in 1869, was just over 212 feet. Oceanliners of the twentieth century, being constructed of steel, are much larger. The Queen Elizabeth, the largest passenger liner ever built, measured over 1,000 feet in length. By modern standards Noah’s ocean vessel is comparable to a small cargo ship, thus still of considerable size.

And David Guzik adds,

Guzik: If the ark carried two of every *family* of animal, there were around 700 pairs of animals; but if the ark carried two of every *species* of animals, there were around 35,000 pairs of animals. The average size of a land animal is smaller than a sheep. The ark could carry 136,560 sheep in *half* of its capacity, leaving plenty of room for people, food, water, and whatever other provisions were needed.

Another clarification on the capacity of the ark's interior is offered by Paul Kretzmann, who writes,

The cubic contents of the vessel thus exceeded 1,800,000 cubic feet, and afforded ample room for the purpose which the ark was to serve, being able, as has been demonstrated, to carry a cargo greater by one-third than any other form of like cubical content.

v16

"You shall make a window for the ark, and complete it to one cubit from the top;

About half of our versions—ESV and the NIVs—translate this “make a **roof** for the ark,” while the other half—LSB, NASB and KJVs—translate it “You shall make a **window** for the ark.” The root of the Hebrew *sohar* (TSO-har) means midday or noon, as a sun (light) demarcated time of day—and, since it is “a bit too obvious to specify that a ‘roof’ should be built, and then to suggest that it is to be ‘toward the top’” (Leupold)—“window” would seem to be the preferred translation. That is, an opening, for light and ventilation, was to be made just under the roof, all the way around the top of the ark. And you might rightly ask, Where does it say “all the way around”? Let’s let Leupold explain.

Leupold: This means more than a window. It means an opening of a cubit from the top or "toward the top." (*milma'lah*) to be made entirely around the structure. This is implied in the verb from “make it complete” (*tekhallénah*) which, being in the Piel stem, signifies, as we might say, "run it completely around" toward the top.

...and set the door of the ark in the side of it;

You might note that while the instructions are explicit, they do not include every last detail for the making of the ark. *Were there other openings? How thick should the planking be? How high up should the door be positioned in the side of the ark?* But there are other instances in the Bible where God hands down instructions that are detailed, yet not complete (e.g., the construction of the first tabernacle and its accouterments), relying on the skills and common sense of the builders to complete the task before them.

I do not agree with those commentators (e.g., Sailhamer) that allow for the possibility that Noah enlisted non-family members to help build the ark.

you shall make it with lower, second, and third decks.”

Not only would having multiple decks (or stories or floors) make for more efficient use of the space and, perhaps, make it more structurally strong, but this could be one way of segregating the different species of animals from one another: carnivores on one floor, herbivores on another; predators on one, prey on another.

The word “decks” or floors or stories is implied, and not in the text—i.e., “with lower, seconds and thirds thou shalt make it.”

Thus far God has not told Noah the *why* for all this—although by now he might be putting two and two together; in v13 God declared that He was “about to destroy [all flesh] with the earth,” followed by a description of a huge “ark” covered in pitch. It would not take much for Noah to realize that God’s method would entail a lot of water—which he details in the next verse.

And when all of Chapter Six draws to a close in v22, we see the proof of Noah’s obedience, and his level of faith and trust in God.

Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.

So once again, as is so often the case in God’s word, at its root this is a story of trust and faith in Yahweh God—as the writer to the Hebrews confirms:

By faith Noah, being warned about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. (Hebrews 11:7)

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